

meal management with a freezer

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consider the pros and cons

You will PROBABLY

Have more choice of time in which to market and to prepare meals. Foods may be prepared at your convenience; favorite foods may be made in quantity yet not served so often that the family tires of them; and foods may be kept on hand for emergencies.

Reduce preparation and cleanup at meal time. One major item already prepared can reduce the time you would normally spend by one-third to one-half. There is a feeling of leisure, for work is accomplished with little pressure and cleanup is reduced. Appetizing, well-balanced meals are possible even if interruptions occur.

Have a wide variety of high quality foods ready to use. Size of servings, seasonings, and amounts of meat, cheese, or other ingredients can be adapted to family needs.

You will NOT NECESSARILY

Save time. Food preparation is not eliminated—it is merely shifted to a more convenient time. But the shift may enable you to use your time to better advantage and may seem like time saved.

Have quick meals. The drawback is the time between removal of the food from the freezer and its appearance on the table. It takes 2 hours to bake a 1½-qt. casserole of frozen food in a 350°F. oven, or to thaw a frozen cake, pudding, or loaf of unsliced bread at room temperature.

Save money. Costs of freezing and storage are added to those of the food. Savings are generally possible only if one-half or more of your food is home produced or purchased at bargain prices.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT: Material for this bulletin was taken from the author's thesis, prepared under the direction of Professors Jean Warren and Alice Briant.

let your freezer help

Meals planned around a freezer are particularly helpful if:

- You work outside your home and have little time to prepare food at meal time
- You have a heavy work load at meal time and wish to lighten it
- You have youngsters you wish to train in meal planning and preparation
- You like to do cooperative cooking
- You prepare meals for only one, two, or three persons
- You are handicapped but able to do your own work if you can take your time

Practice chain cooking

Chain cooking means preparing more food than will be needed at one time with the intention of using the surplus later. If you own a freezer, you can prepare multiples of your favorite recipes and freeze them for use any time within 4 to 6 weeks.

Two ways to combine chain cooking with freezer use are:

1. Double one or two of the recipes already planned for a meal and freeze the surplus. This extends the preparation time for the meal in which you do the doubling.

2. Double, and sometimes quadruple, several items. Save out enough for one meal, if desired, and freeze the rest. This method uses free time not associated with a meal.

The second method has several advantages over the first because:

- Time pressures tend to be less since all foods need not be ready to serve at once nor meal service dovetailed with preparation for the freezer.
- There is time to make complicated, new, or time-consuming dishes.
- A bargain food purchased in quantity may be made immediately into several different dishes.
- By-products of one recipe may be used in another. For example, left-over broth and meat may be frozen in other dishes.
- Whole meals may be prepared to advantage.
- Cooperative work may be effectively organized.

with everyday meals

When choosing **WHAT** you will prepare for the freezer, plan to:

- Experiment by freezing single recipes before doubling them and doubling recipes before quadrupling them.

Foods act differently when frozen or multiplied. Also, quadrupling gets you into quantity cooking for which your equipment may not be suitable.

- Freeze only products which will actually save time later.

It usually does not help to freeze foods whose chief ingredients are canned goods or mixes.

- Freeze foods in a form which will require a minimum of further work.

For example, remove cooked chicken from the bones to use for casseroles or salads; shape whipped cream into individual swirls on a cookie sheet, freeze uncovered, then slide into polyethylene bags for storing.

- Have variety as well as quantity and quality.

In general, one or two family-sized portions of any item—enough for two meals for the family or one meal with guests—are enough to keep in the freezer.

Some exceptions are yeast breads, soups, stews, pastry, chili, fried chicken, Swiss steak, meat sauces, meat balls, and meat loaves. These foods have long cooking periods, may be served frequently, and are easy to prepare in quantity. Their quality is not affected by small variations in proportions, and they hold up well in any container which can be sealed air-tight.

- Limit the variety of recipes made at one time.

It may be easier to prepare casseroles and desserts on different days. Select recipes requiring the same utensils and supplies for any one cooking period.

- Avoid waiting for things to cook.

Choose some foods which can be cooked on surface burners while others are baking.

When deciding HOW you will work, plan to:

- Measure ingredients as you need them.
Measuring ahead is impractical unless you have many small containers, trays for ingredients of each recipe, much counter space, and more than one oven.
- Combine tasks to reduce repetition.
Chop onions or nuts, squeeze lemon juice, or grate lemon rind for a day's needs at one time. If amounts are unknown, leave equipment out, ready to use as needed.
- Freeze foods as quickly as possible.
Cool to 50°F. in iced or running cold water, then freeze at the lowest setting of the controls. Freeze chilled food unwrapped rather than let it sit at room temperature while a meal is eaten or you work on other foods. Wrapping may be done any time within 24 hours.
- Select wrappings and containers which are moisture-vapor-proof and package to exclude as much air as possible.
Freezer containers take up less cupboard space than regular household containers, but are more expensive due to the need for frequent replacement. Six trips through the freezer is the average life of a foil pan.
Casseroles, meat loaves, puddings, and similar foods can be frozen in baking pans, removed from the containers (which have been placed in hot water for a minute), and then wrapped for storage. When needed, a package can be unwrapped, returned to the original container, and baked.

packaging materials

For foods to be baked:
heavy aluminum foil containers
and household utensils

For foods to be reheated on top of
the range: glass freezer jars,
plastic containers, waxed cartons,
and polyethylene bags

To close packages:
locker tape, rubber bands, pipe
cleaners, or snap clothespins

- Mark the expiration date on each package.
Colored tapes or crayons make it easy to indicate different months.

- Organize your freezer space, keeping like items together.

Wire baskets and cake racks can be used as dividers.

Keep a shallow basket and small polyethylene bags or wide-mouth jars for small items such as grated lemon rind, chopped nuts or green peppers, toasted coconut, sautéed mushrooms or onions, and pimiento.

Have a plan for using everything you store.

FROZEN FOOD INVENTORY

<u>PRODUCT</u>	<u>Container size</u>	<u>No. of servings</u>	<u>Packages in freezer</u>
Spaghetti sauce with meat	1 pint	4	
Chili (meat sauce only)	1 pint	2	+
Peas	1 pint	6	+ +

keep
a simple
inventory

This may be merely an in-and-out record. Complicated forms are impractical because many prepared foods must be held level until solidly frozen and this may require frequent reorganization of the freezer. Also, there may be only a few packages of each item.

TITLE OF THE RECIPE

Yield (original recipe) _____

Pan size _____

Oven temperature _____

Fresh product Frozen product

Baking time _____

Ingredients:

Amounts per recipe
x1 x2 x4

Method:

Freezing directions:

Record those recipes you have found especially suited to quantity preparation and freezing

develop a recipe file

give special attention

CASSEROLES

Mashed potatoes, macaroni, rice, noodles, and biscuits tend to become pasty when frozen with sauces or other moist foods. Some suggestions for minimizing these and other undesirable changes are:

- Use egg noodles when noodles are called for.
- Use as little fat as possible. It tends to rise to the surface and does not blend in when reheated. Ground round or chuck is a better choice than hamburger.
- Package casseroles in shallow containers. Containers 2 inches or less in depth allow the food to freeze and thaw rapidly.
- Freeze casseroles before baking them; bake without thawing.
- Freeze the sauces only. At meal time, reheat and combine with canned, frozen, or freshly cooked foods to complete the casseroles.

MEAT SAUCES and GRAVIES CREAM SAUCES and PIE FILLINGS

These foods tend to separate and curdle during freezing and thawing. Special thickeners, such as rice flour or waxy maize, are used commercially to prevent these changes but are not generally available in retail stores. To help maintain their quality:

- Make meat sauces thicker than usual by leaving out one-fourth to one-third of the liquid. When the sauces are needed, add this amount of hot liquid and reheat quickly, stirring to make smooth. Combine the hot sauce with canned, frozen, or freshly cooked foods—for example, chili con carne sauce with canned kidney beans.
- Reduce the fat for cream sauces and gravies by 1 teaspoon per cup of liquid.
- Cool lemon pie fillings before adding the lemon juice.
- Package these foods in small amounts—no larger than 1 quart—to speed up freezing and thawing.

STARCHY FOODS for main courses

- Undercook noodles, rice, macaroni, and spaghetti. Reheating will complete their cooking.
- Freeze biscuits as "brown and serve" items (baked but not browned) if they are to be used as a topping for casseroles or a base for sauces. Brown at 425°F. before serving.

to some products

- Shape mashed potatoes into mounds on a cookie sheet; freeze; slide into pliofilm bags for freezer storage. Return to the cookie sheet and reheat at 400°F. before serving.
- Omit potatoes from stews that are to be frozen. Add them when reheating the stews.

CAKES, COOKIES, and BREADS

Products made from frozen unbaked batters and doughs tend to be slightly less tender and smaller in volume than freshly made ones or those baked before freezing. These changes will be minimized if you:

- Freeze cake batter in layer cake pans. Bake without thawing and increase the baking time by 5 to 10 minutes.
- Freeze yeast rolls and biscuits as "brown and serve" foods (baked but not browned). Brown them as 425°F. before serving.
- Freeze cookie dough in any desired shape. As needed, slice and bake without thawing.

PASTRY

When frozen in contact with pie fillings, pastry tends to absorb moisture and to become soggy. A better way is to make a PASTRY BANK—that is, prepare pastry in quantity, roll it into sheets, then treat it in any of the following ways:

- Stack on a cookie sheet or cardboard, separating each layer with a double thickness of cellophane or waxed paper; wrap in polyethylene or in foil (drug store wrap). Small clothespins will make closures that are easily opened and replaced. Remove sheets as needed and thaw 10 to 15 minutes. Shape and bake.
- Shape the sheets into the pans and stack, separated by one thickness of cellophane or waxed paper. To minimize air spaces and protect the pastry, place an empty pie pan inside the top shell. Wrap in polyethylene or foil. Bake without thawing.
- Bake the pie shells before freezing. Package individually in polyethylene bags or foil. Use with or without thawing.

Though pastry shaped into the pans is more nearly ready to use, pastry frozen in flat sheets takes up less freezer space. Frozen baked pastry is ready for immediate use for chiffon pies or baked Alaskas, or to fill with cream fillings.

PLATE MEALS: tv dinners—meat and two vegetables

The uneven shapes of the food make it difficult to avoid air pockets when wrapping. Air dries out food. To minimize this:

- Pour gravy over thin slices of meat.
- Use vegetables which are already frozen. For each plate, use $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of a 10-ounce package—avoid thawing. Sprinkle each portion with salt, and top with a pat of butter. Cover the plate closely with aluminum foil, seal air-tight, and freeze quickly. To retain the color of green vegetables during reheating cut a slit in the wrapper just above the vegetables. Heat in the wrapper in a 400°F. oven for 30 to 35 minutes.
- Use plate meals within 3 to 4 weeks.

consider work and storage space

Meal management with a freezer involves some quantity food preparation and may require additional or different equipment and work space. The following suggestions may prove helpful:

- Try to have ample work and storage space at each major center.
If necessary, a sturdy table may be used to supplement counter space.
A space 24 by 48 inches is convenient for portioning and packaging.
A space 30 inches high is good for chopping and mixing.
Trays, tea wagons, or any carts with shelves are handy for moving items.
- Plan separate work areas if two or more persons are to work together.
- Store supplies and equipment where they're used most frequently. Keep freezer supplies near the largest work space.
- Have an ample supply of sharp knives, large bowls, mixing spoons, and measuring equipment; a large chopping board, an electric mixer with a motor sufficiently powerful to handle heavy loads, and a timer or two—one for the range and the other for use at any work center.
- Use large shallow saucepans, skillets, or Dutch ovens for making sauces and browning meats in quantity.
- Have convenient and adequate facilities for disposing of garbage.
- Have a divided sink with bowls large enough for big equipment.
- Have the range close to the sink so you can check your cooking while working. In quantity preparation, frequent checking is necessary.

AUGUST 1959



Cooperative Extension Service, New York State College of Home Economics at Cornell University and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. In furtherance of the Acts of Congress May 8, June 30, 1914. M. C. Bond, Director of Extension, Ithaca, New York.

